NEW FICTION

'Jump or Drop Out,' Says Lord Saltash

THE OBSTACLE RACE. By Ethel M. Dell. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

"AND then, just as she reached the level, very sharply she stopped. It was as if a hand had caught her back. For suddenly there rose up before her a figure so strange that for a moment she felt almost like a scared child. It sprang from the bushes and stood facing her like an animal at bay—a short creature, neither man nor boy, misshapen, grotesquely humped, possessing long thin arms of almost baboonlike proportions. The head was sunken into the shoulders. It was flung back and the face upraised—and it was the face that made her pause, for it was the most pathetic sight she had ever looked upon. It was the face of a lad of two or three and twenty, but drawn in lines so painful, so hollowed, so piteous, that fear melted into compassion at the sight. The dark eyes that stared upward had a frightened look mingled with a certain defiance. He stood barefooted on the edge of the cliff, clenching and unclenching his bony hands, with the air of a culprit awaiting sentence."

This is the boy who has kept Dick in the tiny fishing and mining town, this misshapen brother who adores him, and whom he loves with a great love almost like a mother's for her crippled offspring.

It is the cripple, Robin, who sees Juliet first. Shortly after that she meets Dick and the real story begins.

Yes, this is an obstacle race—not only for Juliet and Dick but for the squire and his wife. In fact, the road is full of obstacles, but as they appear in definite form both Dick and Juliet take the "thing at a full gallop and clear it before you know where you are."

Lord Saltash advises Juliet, "when it comes to an obstacle race there are three courses open to you. Either you refuse to jump and drop out—which is usually the safest thing to do. Or you take the thing at full gallop and clear it before you know where you are. Or you go at it with a weak heart and come to grief. I don't advise the last, anyway. It's so futile—as well as being beastly humiliating."

Saltash is an old friend from London. And his value becomes evident when Juliet takes the last hurdle and does not find Dick waiting for her there. Despite all Saltash's angles of speech we had to like him very much. He proved a friend in the end, both to Juliet and to Dick.

Robin, is one of the big obstacles, so he thinks and so everybody else thinks except Juliet and Dick. Yet Robin proves "the great friend"—even to his own brother!

"I'll try to take you as I find you and—make the best of you. But, to be quite honest, I am rather afraid of the hard side of you. It is so very uncompromising. If I ever come up against it—I believe I shall run away!" so Juliet told Dick. Every one in the book came up against Dick's hard side. Every one was hurt by it to some extent, but Dick was honest—he was just and he loved his friends. Life had not led him into any rosy side paths beside the straight way. The man had made himself what he was, holding a shield between his own heart and the world.

Mrs. Rickett, at whose house Juliet stayed when she first left London for a rest, knows the life of the town and she imparts her information lavishly.

"London! It's like a great wheel that is never still. . . . They (the people there) just tear about from morning till night and very often from night till morning. Every one is always trying to get first and to be a little smarter than any one else. They think they enjoy it. But they really don't. It's such a whirl, such a strain—like always running at top speed in a race and never getting there. Yes, it's just that—a sort of obstacle race, and the obstacles always getting higher and higher and higher. Well, I've done with it, Robin. I'm not going to get over any more. I've dropped out. I'm going to grow old in comfort."

In this story Miss Dell has given us her most attractive heroine. Dick Green and Lord Saltash are by far the best male characters she has ever portrayed in her books.

The story is a new type for Miss Dell. There is a cleverly protected mystery, unveiled only in the last pages; but more important than plot, her people are modified in their development by love, by friendship, by the drawing out of the inherent good and tenderness in every soul.

We are sure that readers who have liked Miss Dell's other work will welcome this book even more than the earlier novels that made her popular, for in this there is emotion, there is suspense—but there is a new note. We think "The Obstacle Race" will outlive her other books, for into it she seems to have put more of the "big stuff"—if you know what we mean!

Growing Up in High School

PAUL AND RHODA. By Fannie Kilbourne. Dodd, Mead & Co.

"A WHEEL within a wheel, a world within a world, is Central High School. It whirls on its own axis and speaks its own tongue. In the main affairs of the outside world do not touch it. A national financial panic is ignored, a national election is as nothing—Central has elections and panics of its own. It even renames the seasons; autumn is football season; winter is midyear exam time; spring is baseball and tennis season; summer is vacation."

This is the atmosphere in which we meet and form a very happy acquaintance with Paul and Rhoda.

Paul is one of those boys who must earn part of their way through high school, and through the university, too. He manages to become very popular, to do a great many things which prove his quality. And with a real girl for a friend, an unselfish girl, with bright ideas and happy ways, and one who is willing to admit her errors, he makes his readers proud of him.

Rhoda is called upon to make sacrifices of the youthful joys which seem at the time to be the greatest things in life, only to find a greater happiness. Paul could not be her partner in the tennis tournament because there was need of his help on the farm from which his mother succeeded in gaining enough to permit him to go to school. He put the matter up frankly to Rhoda. Then we have a clear vision of the author's understanding of young people, of a young boy and a young girl between whom there has been no expression of more than politeness.

"The girl that had always been Rhoda would have wished Paul to agonize with her in all that she was giving up, she would have played the martyr in doing it. It was the woman Rhoda would some time be that stirred now. She wanted Paul to do the right thing—that might have been the girl in her. But—this was the woman—she wanted to make it as easy as she could for him.

"'The tournament's nothing but a school affair, after all,' she said bravely, forswearing her whole world. 'I'd do it, in a minute, if it were my mother. I—I don't care an awful lot.' It was a gallant lie and—the woman in her still speaking—she went on at once to talk about the orchard, to make Paul forget the tournament altogether."

Without seeking it, she had her reward. She planned for a crowd of the high school girls and boys to go to the farm with him, to help in the fields. And the glory which would have been hers had she and Paul been the winners in the tournament was overshadowed by a large picture of her and big headlines in the paper—the front page—telling how "Central High Fights Labor Shortage" and under her picture the words, "High School Senior Who Leads Original Enterprise."

The final chapter will take the old folks back to the days when they graduated after four glorious years of high school life and—study. It will take the young folks through their present joys and sorrows, and maybe make them a little more considerate of such classmates as Jane and Marie, who were not popular and not near as happy as Rhoda—nor as lovable.

Spanish Orange Blossoms

THE TORRENT (ENTRE NARANJOS). By Vicente Blasco Ibanez. Translated from the Spanish by Isaac Goldberg and Arthur Livingston. E. P. Dutton & Co.

THE spell of lyric love amidst the exquisite and perfumed beauty of Valencia's orange groves by moonlight, passages of a greater delicacy than is the wont of the vigorous Spaniard, remain with one even after reading to a disillusioning end Blasco Ibanez's latest book, "The Torrent." "Entre Naranjos" (Among the Orange Groves), the original title, would seem to be more appropriate, as except for the spring flood which bears the hero to the rescue of his idol and is the means of gaining him an entrance to her friendship there is no torrent other than the words poured out by the women in their passion.

The most picturesque part of southern Spain, the lovely Ribera of Valencia, is the scene; the story one of struggle between Bourgeois and Bohemian with a truly great love at stake. Ward politics, district bosses, peasant shrewdness and superstition are vividly depicted. There is the licentious old man, the vacillating youth of the Four Horsemen, although neither is so admirable a character as in that book. The disillusionment lies not in the return to her former career of the glorious, dynamic singer, the Valkyrie who had won lovers from all Europe, but rather in the grovelling weakness of the youth. Happiness within his grasp, he repudiates the prize he has won, to return to calculating respectability and family prominence in Alcira and to take a wealthy peasant wife who continues to make thrift as odious and virtue as unalluring as had his mother before her.

With the realism which he never spares Ibanez brings the deserted prima donna, more beautiful and fascinating than ever, face to face with her Rafael after eight years, during which time the hero has grown bald and corpulent as the deputy from Alcira. At least it proves to him that his outrage against the one love of springtime and youth has not been justified by any particular services to the district of Alcira.

The novelist's portrayal of the life and psychology of a little village, his knowledge of the history of his localities, recall that during his visit to this country he showed a wide knowledge of history and a gift for seizing upon the characteristics of any place and taking them all in with rather amazing rapidity and accuracy. While in the Southwest a reception was arranged for Ibanez in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he met many Spanish-Americans, types who interested him keenly, and about whom he asked a perfect volley of questions. He had the history of practically every one in the room, indeed every one who looked distinctive or interesting, before the evening was over, and had "interviewed" the majority of those who themselves came to see and interview the celebrated Spanish author.

He seemed to fill in mentally the outlines given him so that those who spoke with him afterward confessed the sensation of feeling that he had laid bare all their lives. Deft characterizations in a shrewd sentence or two delighted his hearers. He impressed every one with his vigorous mentality, but although his head and features are handsome and intellectual there is a certain grossness and sensuality about them which a heavy body and rather small feminine hands corroborate. His pallor and heavy appetite gave an impression of overindulgence of the vulgarian. In contrast to the robust out of doors color of the Western men his skin seemed dead white.

His interest in everything was keen; an intellectual rather than a personal interest in people. After a trip to Santa Fe, the quaint old capital, he promised a book on that region. His erudition in regard to the history of even that part of the country surprised the university men who went with him on the trip. "Falso" was the sottovoce verdict evoked on tapping a bell exhibited as an antique of several centuries by an old padre. Turning the thing around Ibanez cleverly deciphered and pointed out marks which showed when the bell was cast and where.

It would have distressed the museum authorities had they overheard the criticism of the mural paintings of Columbus and his caravel. One glance was sufficient for the visitor to take it all in and to discover that the ships were not historically correct. He had made a study of ships of the Spanish navy throughout its history at one time when he was writing something in South America and pointed out that that type of caravel was not used by Columbus when he discovered America.

The same passion for detail and fund of information was evidenced in every topic touched upon, except for subjects of purely local origin, and then the reporter quality for which Ibanez has been criticised showed. This and a swift leaping at things would account partly for his prolific production and an occasional disregard for petty detail. An instance of this is seen in "The Torrent"—"Her large ungainly feet (speaking of the maid), quite out of harmony with the pair of stylish boots she was wearing, cast off articles, doubtless, of the lady." And in the next paragraph the author writes of the lady that she had "feet that must have been as agile and strong as they were tiny."

But maybe the wonderful lady had seven league boots; at any rate, she is a creature who transports the reader more readily and holds the attention more easily than any other of Ibanez's heroines we have known. And the tragedy of losing love which at least seemed a redemption is all the more poignant for the insistence in the reader's memory of those scented fairy groves of orange blossoms.

ALIDA F. SIMS.

Seven years have gone into the making of Samuel Hopkins Adams's latest novel, "Success" (Houghton Mifflin Company), a newspaper story. Mr. Adams was for ten years after graduating from college a reporter on the New York *Sun*.

Window Opened Into a Deep Cave

QUILL'S WINDOW. By George Barr McCutcheon. Dodd, Mead & Co.

GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON can do it every time. Given a pretty girl, a villain, a war that he can drag in by the heels, and he will write a good tale for you. "Quill's Window" runs along in a typical McCutcheon fashion and ends happily. In these modern days, when the happy ending has been struck down in the avalanche of realism, perhaps the Pollyannas will appreciate this book. At any rate, the tale is worth reading on the suburban train that would bore one to death in any case.

"Quill's window" is evidently the opening in the side of a mountain leading to a deep cave, where in days gone by horse thieves and other fugitives from the justice seeking farmers took refuge. It was hated and feared by the neighbors, for it was thought to be haunted. A man had been murdered by his father-in-law and his wife had been buried with him in the bottom of Quill's window. The place was kept locked from the curious passerby by the heroine of the story, Alix Crown, a daughter of the dead couple.

Into the village comes Courtney Thane, a so-called ex-service man. With a limp and a taking manner he creates a stir in the village and becomes quite popular because of his readiness and ability to talk about his war experiences. Alix Crown almost falls in love with him, but McCutcheon could never allow that, so the friend of the family looks up the man's war record and finds it is all bunk. The real he man in the case turns up—Thane's seduction of a young village girl who ended her life is revealed, and he is killed by the dead girl's brother. Of course Alix Crown marries the boyhood sweetheart, and all is well.

We cannot quite understand why Mr. McCutcheon must rely on the ability of his heroes and heroines to sport panama hats and motor cars of specified brands. These names are always brought out predominantly. So, dear reader, if you don't wear a certain panama hat and do insist upon the family Ford you will read this book with a sense of inferiority. The plot is obviously worked out, and in all fairness we cannot fail to feel that there are no ragged ends. Perhaps it is comforting to believe that somewhere there is some romance. Somewhere there are happy endings. Of course, dear reader, you have only to decide what you want. If you want this sort of thing, read this book and close it with a feeling that you have read about all you believe. If you don't believe in it—have no romance in your life—only stark reality staring you in the face, read "Quill's Window" anyway, and realize that perhaps you should bury your cynicism and believe that love makes the world go round. Forget, old dear, that Fate throws a monkey wrench in the wheels now and then.

India Still Aids The Plot Makers

PRINCE CINDERELLA. By Grace Alexander. The Bobbs-Merrill Company.

THERE is indeed a gayety in this book which is catching, but why did the author have to bring the hatred of India into the pages? You can't get away from it this season. Maybe our disposition has grown crabbed, but if you had read as many books about India and its mysticism and hatred as we have during the last few months you would think that authors could not believe a book was a book or a seller unless India was either written in red throughout its pages or at least in black type.

Nevertheless the author has given us a jolly good story, plausible in plot, just mysterious enough to be delightful and permit you to sleep after the lights are out and you are alone with your thoughts. She has drawn her people together into such combinations as bring out in startling clearness those hidden characteristics which all human beings are able to keep hidden until their complements or opposites come along and tear off their outer selves. It is light fiction, for those who like mystery and for those who like romance, ballasted with just enough serious character study. And it is written delightfully in the first person.

Love Tangle in South Africa

FORESHADOWED. By F. E. Mills Young. George H. Doran Company.

"FORESHADOWED" is a story which starts on the South African veldt and deals with the cities of that region, which are still crude and frontierlike. There is a description of the tropic night which approaches Olive Schreiner in vividness, but in the main the story is not localized.

It deals with a tragedy which might take place anywhere. The heroine marries a man who is a scheming intriguer and through pride she stands by him, even when he covers her with shame and humiliation. At last she is wrought to a pitch when she is willing to flee with another man, whose love for her is deeper and truer, but the suicide of her husband causes a barrier between her and her real mate.